

# Teacher lesson idea

## Green Man



The Green Man is a mythical figure often portrayed as a mask made entirely of leaves. Typically, Green Man figures are carved in stone or wood; they may also be crafted in stained glass or inked in the

style of illuminated manuscripts. In pre-Christian religions, trees were sacred and forest groves were dwelling places of gods and nature spirits. In Celtic mythology, the Green Man is a god of spring and summer who disappears and returns year after year. This apparent death and resurrection may be why many Christian churches are also decorated with his image.

See [www.canterburygreenman.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.canterburygreenman.fsnet.co.uk) for more details.

Many trees have old stories that have grown up with them. The stories are based on something interesting or unusual about the tree. They often talk about the tree as though it were a person. Included in this resource are stories about three of our native trees.

### Woodland activity

For children to start creating a mask of their own imaginary Green Man, the process begins with a visit to a wood to collect information on a chosen tree.

### You will need:

Copy of a tree story for each group – some included as part of this resource

Tree record sheets – included as part of this resource

Sketching pencils

Thin, smooth paper and wax crayons for bark/leaf rubbings

- Divide the children into 3 groups with an adult each.
- Send each group to find one of the suggested trees.
- Listen to the story about the tree whilst standing next to or sitting under the tree.
- Next, make a study of the tree. Fill in the tree record sheet provided.
- Do bark and leaf rubbings on separate pieces of paper.
- Collect a few samples from the tree (preferably from the ground)

### Classroom activity

(follow up to woodland activity)

### You will need:

Design a Green Man mask worksheet, included as part of this resource

tree stories included as part of this resource

completed tree record sheets

bark or leaf rubbings made in wood

natural objects collected in wood (leaves, flowers, seed heads etc.)

large paper plates or circles of card

art materials (suggestions on pupil worksheet)



Tree name	Draw a leaf from this tree
Draw the shape of the whole tree	
	Draw a flower, fruit or seed from this tree
	Do a rubbing of the bark-texture on a separate piece of paper



### Design a Green Man mask

Use the story about your chosen tree and your sketches to make your own Green Man mask. Try to imagine what your Green Man's face might look like.

- Which part of the tree would be best to use as the hair and beard?
- Could you use flowers, fruits or seeds as the eyes or ears?
- Perhaps you could use the texture of the bark to make the skin?
- Can you use the colours and textures on both sides of the leaves to add details?
- Does the shape of the whole tree help you to imagine the character of your Green Man?

Take a paper plate, draw a rough outline then use some of these art techniques to help you make your mask.

**Blow Painting** – good for spidery shapes, branches and twigs. You will need two or more colours of watery paint & drinking straws. Dip a straw into each paint and drip colours close together on to the area to be painted. Place a straw above the middle of the paint and blow very hard. As you blow, 'chase' the paint outwards to make spiky shapes. Try blowing the paint in different directions.

**Rubbings** – good for texture of bark and leaves. You will need thick wax crayons, white paper, scissors, and glue. Put the paper over the surface to be rubbed. If this is a tree trunk, ask a friend to hold it still for you. If it is a leaf, put the leaf under the paper with the veined side upwards. Use the wax crayon on its side and rub over the paper. You can now cut out some of these rubbings to stick on your Green Man mask.

**Cotton bud dotting** – good for blossom or small fruits. You will need: cotton buds, sponge cloths, plastic dishes, poster paints. Cut a piece of sponge cloth to fit into the bottom of each plastic pot. Spread a different colour of paint on to each cloth. Press a cotton bud onto the sponge and use this to print dots. Use a separate cotton bud for each colour.

**Wax resist** – Draw the main parts of your character in bold wax crayons. Paint over the top with watery paint to colour the background.

**Fine black ink pen** – Add details after paints have dried.

**Collage** – Use some of the natural objects you have collected from the wood to add to your mask. You will need to use a fairly strong glue to stick on some seed heads etc.

### Tree stories

#### Yew

Yew trees are a very dark green colour. An old folk-tale tells why yews are dressed so darkly.

*Many moons ago, the yew tree was very sad. It thought all other trees were more beautiful. Their colourful leaves could flutter in the wind but the yew only had stiff needles. The tree thought that the fairies had made it unattractive on purpose!*

*The fairies felt sorry for the yew so they changed its needles into gold leaves. This made the yew happy. But robbers came and stole all the gold leaves, leaving it very sad again. So, the fairies gave it lovely crystal leaves which sparkled in the sunlight. But a storm came and the crystals were smashed in to tiny pieces. Then the fairies gave it broad, green leaves to wave in the air. This time, they were eaten by goats! The yew then realised that the dark green needles were really the best because they stayed forever, didn't smash, get eaten or taken. The yew was happy again with the clothes that it was always meant to have.*

#### Alder

The leaf-buds of the alder are a deep purple colour. There is an ancient myth that seeks to explain this unusual colour.

*Alder used to be known as the best wood to make whistles and pipes. The music played on these pipes was said to be very beautiful. The topmost branch of the alder became known as the 'singing head' of the ancient raven-god Bran. This tree became Bran's special, sacred tree. It is said that the colour of the leaf buds is 'royal purple' in honour of Bran. The leaves are still used today to make beautiful dyes.*

#### Goat Willow

The Goat Willow is more a bush than a tree. It has round shaped leaves which are silver underneath. Its large catkin-buds look like cats' tails hence it being commonly known as pussy willow.

*On female trees the silver catkins turn to grey spiky flowers. On male trees they turn bright yellow and are full of pollen. Druids used to cut wands from male goat-willow trees as they thought that the change from silver to gold was magical. They used them to protect themselves against evil and would both carry them and place them in their homes.*

Other tree stories can be found in:

'A Tree in Your Pocket' by Jacqueline Memory Paterson ISBN 0-7225-3778-6 [www.thorsons.com](http://www.thorsons.com)

'Tree Wisdom' by the same author, ISBN 0-7225-3408-6.

